

## **Engagement Ideas For the Classroom** ***In Search of Walt Whitman***

### *1. Civil War Poetry*

Play a few excerpts from Part Two that highlight Whitman's Civil War poetry, such as "The Wound-Dresser," "A Sight in Camp in the Daybreak Gray and Dim," "O Captain! My Captain!" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd."

These poems may fire the imaginations of students to write their own poetry. After watching these excerpts, have students write their own Civil War poem.

### *2. Writing a Letter Home*

Play an excerpt from Part Two that focuses on Whitman's writing letters on behalf of sick and injured Civil War soldiers recuperating in the hospitals.

Have students write letters home on behalf of injured or dying soldiers of any war – either historical (such as the Civil War) or recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This assignment may offer students the chance to feel empathy for wounded soldiers and their loved ones as well as to experience history in a more intimate way. (All viewpoints should be welcomed.)

### *3. Lincoln's Assassination*

Show an excerpt from Part Two that dramatizes Peter Doyle's eyewitness account of the assassination.

Students can gain valuable experience working with primary documents by researching the assassination through witnesses, such as Peter Doyle and others, to develop a report on the assassination and its aftermath.

### *4. Political Parties and Slavery*

Play an excerpt from Part One that discusses Whitman's activism in the Free Soil Party.

Have students research the various political parties that were active shortly before the Civil War. How did the Free Soil Party differ from Abolitionists and pro-slavery factions? Students can find historical artifacts of each viewpoint, such as posters, articles, banners, first person accounts, photographs, and speeches. This activity will offer students the opportunity to engage in primary documents and understand the role political parties played during the antebellum period.

### *5. Journalism*

Show an excerpt from Part Two that brings to life Whitman's newspaper account of Abraham Lincoln's second Inauguration and Inaugural Ball.

Students could research how Whitman wrote about those events and compare and contrast with how journalists have more recently covered similar occasions. What might we learn about how journalism has both changed and stayed the same?